Democratic Dangers

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The political landscape of India witnessed a historical about-turn when the Bharatiya Janata Party decisively ended the decade-long political monopoly of the Indian National Congress. At times it seems hard to unravel the knotted intricacies of the intertwined multi-ethnic and multicultural relationships and conflicts that lay behind the BJP's striking victory in 2014, which has ushered in a new era of expectations for the people of India.

As the defeat of the Congress demonstrates, no political dynasty can sustain its power over time and new interests and claimants to power repeatedly emerge. Throughout, however, this cycle remains subordinate to the urge for the acquisition of power, which lies at the very core of human nature. Yet while this impetus to power is now usually pursued in the name of particular social groups, communities or societies, the particular so-called 'game changers' mostly come from recognised leadership elite.

In the same way, the rapid Hinduisation of society in India could result from two main factors. First, Hindutva, which is portrayed as the true representation of the Hindu society, is presented as a saviour and therefore needs itself to be rescued before the vision wanes. But second, as always religion is being used, shaped and subtlety implanted in the minds of the collective society by the power mongers so as to attain political positions. It seems undeniable that the politicians in India, like those in any other state, are equipped with a range of fiery slogans, promises and pledges. Yet these are hardly ever translated into reality after these leaders succeed in attaining power.

Therefore, India's recent political conflicts are all about power politics. Otherwise, one decisive factor behind the BJP landslide was the multiplicity of media communications which became a juggernaut that crushed its rivals. It is, of course, part and parcel of the campaign and involves the political stakeholders advertising themselves as the most suitable candidate for office but the media, as the architect of opinion, should be responsible for digging into exposing the negative behaviour and misleading statements of a government once it has taken power.

Even so, an uninterrupted process of democratisation and incremental progress in India is not only ameliorating the inefficiencies of governmens, but also providing platforms for the collective voice of even such naive people as the members of the Aam Aadmi Party or 'Lay Men Party'. In this way, democracy does make a difference, regardless of its flaws and loopholes.

Moreover, both the BJP and Modi as its protagonist were the offspring of the RSS. Modi, in particular, had been feathered and weathered by its ideology, and it will be interesting to observe how long he remains a prisoner of Hindutva. If he breaks the shackles of this bondage, what might the implications be for the BJP-RSS link and, in case of a backlash, how might Modi react? And at the same time, what consequences could

this have for the Indian polity and its voters? In addressing these issues, it is important to remember that over 60 percent of the BJP's office-holders at the centre and in the states are either former Pracharak (full-time RSS workers) or have bonded with the RSS.

Amit Shah, for example, is now a close confidant and aide of Narendra Modi, as well as the current BJP president. He, too, was nurtured in the RSS nursery, and in the recent elections took the BJP from the nadir to the apex in Uttar Pardesh (UP) by winning 71 seats out of 80. Despite being notorious in connection with the Gujarat arson of 2002, and with the more recent Muzaffarnagar riots, his old comradeship with Modi bore fruit for him and the party. Any face-off between the RSS and the BJP is thus unlikely.

We have yet to see with what magnitude the RSS will attempt to intrude and influence the BJP's policies in the way it used to in the past. At the same time, the RSS will always expect that the Hindu Swaraj should have first priority in the BJP's policies. But given Modi's fluid and whimsical character, he can always adapt and is in the best position to afford 'the road not taken'. The real test of the policies, leadership and political cadres will come if and when the BJP arrives at some critical juncture, whether it be because of domestic or international reasons. This will then clarify the nature of the recent victory.

Domestically, India is passing through a transitional phase. Having emerged from an egalitarian and majoritarian encounter, the contemporary Hindu nationalist forces have managed to eclipse their secular foes by their rise to hegemonic power. This has been achieved but it is as yet unclear whether or not this means secular India is defeated once and for all.

Questions that still linger are: will Dalits ever live like the Brahmins? Will India's large Muslim minority ever receive their legitimate rights of liberty of religious practice, be freed of prejudice and racism, and have full freedom of expression? Will India's downtrodden masses ever be freed of poverty, and will solutions ever be devised to deal with the endemic plagues of bribery, embezzlement, public plundering, corruption, and crimes against women?

Communal and caste politics will pose mounting challenges for those hoping to bring the whole of Indian society under one roof despite boundaries of caste, religion, colour, creed, and race. If the same hackneyed tactics continue to haunt the unfortunate Indian people for the sake of the political ambitions of the few, segregation and isolation will continue to disrupt social harmony, and the violence provoked by sectarianism, extremism, communal and caste violence will be an ever-present danger.